

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today Congressman John W. Olver released the following statement explaining his "PRESENT" vote on House Resolution 34:

"When House Resolution 34 was voted on January 9<sup>th</sup>, I voted PRESENT, a tactic I have very rarely used in my years of service in Congress. I voted PRESENT for basically two reasons. First, the resolution barely mentioned the overwhelming humanitarian crisis that has resulted from the actions taken by both sides of the conflict in the last three weeks. And second, because the resolution assigned blame for what has transpired solely and totally on one side of the conflict; while the balance of blame may be one-sided, no fair assessment could be that simple.

On the first point, I have sent a letter to President Bush urging him to work with Israel to ensure that immediate steps are taken to meet humanitarian needs. 

*(To read the text of that letter, please click on the following link:*

[http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ma01\\_olver/Gazaletter.html](http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ma01_olver/Gazaletter.html)

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 The situation is dire. One million people in the Gaza Strip are without electricity at any given moment. Also, two thirds of Gaza's water wells have shut down or are only partially operating, leaving up to 800,000 people without clean water. Because sewage cannot be treated and pumped properly, it is flooding into heavily populated areas, farmland and the Mediterranean Sea. In addition to these infrastructure concerns, hospitals in Gaza are completely overloaded and are unable to provide adequate care because they lack medicine, supplies, equipment and medical professionals. Further compounding the situation, patients are no longer able to cross the border for medical care in Israel, the West Bank, Jordan or Egypt.

On the second point, we must remember that the oft stated goal of American foreign policy is a democratic Israel with secure borders living side by side in peace and security with a viable, independent, and democratic Palestinian state.

This goal is twice repeated in the preamble and in the body of the resolution. I totally support that goal, and have so voted on many occasions. &nbsp;

But I must view action by both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of that goal insomuch as what makes achieving that goal harder is negative and what makes it easier to achieve that goal is positive.

The people of Israel have a right to be safe in their homes and daily lives. The random launching of rockets and mortars from Gaza into southern Israel is a continuing act of terrorism and I have repeatedly voted to condemn those actions. Israel has every right to defend itself against such attacks as would any sovereign nation so attacked. However, in what way to respond is a matter of choice.

By Israel's count, more than 6,000 rockets have been launched from Gaza into Israel over eight years since January 2001. Also by Israel's count, 20 Israelis have been killed by those rockets.

By the count of U.N. personnel, hospital officials and those reporters who have remained in Gaza, in the current three week siege, over 900 Gazans have been killed and over 5,000 have been wounded or injured. Such numbers utterly overwhelm available medical personnel and facilities. More than one third of those killed or injured are estimated to be women or children.

Israel has been severely hurt in world opinion by the siege of Gaza, but worse yet, hope for a sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is close to being snuffed out.

To reach that long held goal, the United States must play an honest broker role as the only world super power that has credible leverage and can provide credible guarantees. The U.S. now needs to emulate and improve upon President Carter's successful effort in brokering the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979, as well as the efforts of President Clinton in facilitating the famous Rabin/Arafat handshake in 1995.

While the road is more difficult than it was 15 or 30 years ago, I believe it is the only way to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. I fervently hope that President Obama will complete the trip."

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